

**Final Report:**  
**United States Coast Guard**  
**Enlisted Career Development Program**  
*Preparing the Enlisted Workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction:**

During the past year and a half, three analysis teams conducted the most sweeping set of studies of the enlisted workforce in Coast Guard history. Taken together, these analyses comprise an integrated and comprehensive performance support plan for the entire Coast Guard enlisted workforce from the time of initial accession to advancement to chief petty officer. The three component studies listed below are collectively entitled the Enlisted Career Development (ECD) Program:

- The Nonrate Workforce Structure Study (NWSS)
  - The Petty Officer Development Initiative (PODI)
  - The Chief Petty Officer Needs Assessment (CPONA)

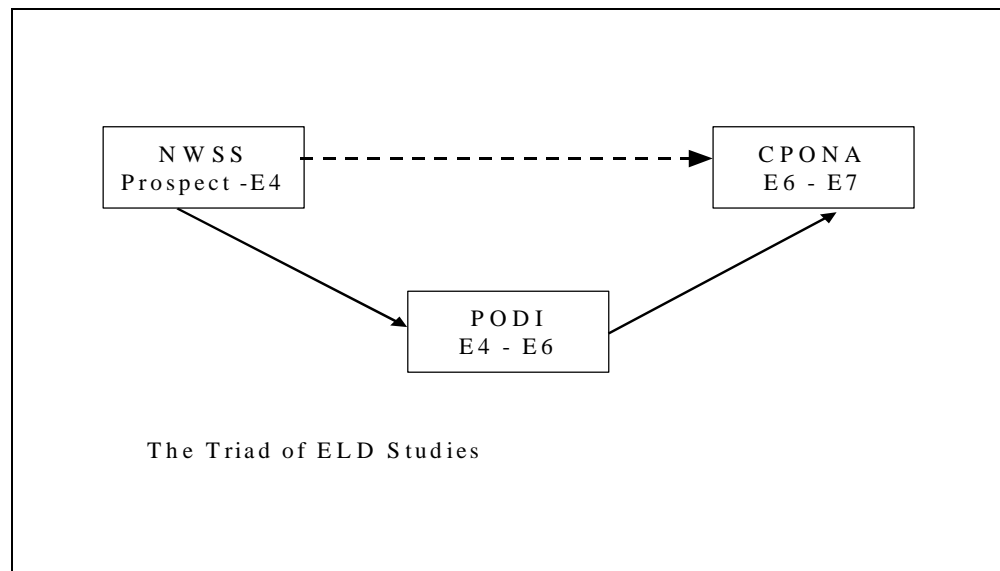
These ECD studies were inherently customer-focused by virtue of the study teams' composition; team members were selected because they best reflected the immediate beneficiaries of this project. These handpicked men and women came from operational units around the Coast Guard. Moreover, at every step specific data were gathered from actual customers at large. The study teams identified the Coast Guard's organizational goals and missions and corresponding unit needs in order to target the desired performance of the enlisted Workforce to accomplish those goals and missions.

In addition to the three studies above, a fourth effort was launched to communicate and validate this collection of analyses. This effort was known as the Enlisted Leadership Initiatives Training and Professional Development Focus Group (ELITE) project. ELITE entailed an unparalleled series of visits to field commands, both large and small, throughout the Coast Guard to communicate the studies' purposes, findings, and recommendations to the Service at large and to conduct focus groups to gather feedback. As a result, nearly 10,000 Coast Guard men and women have already been personally briefed on the ECD projects and have provided virtually unanimous support for their results.

No large organizational initiatives of this kind in recent memory have been so thoroughly vetted at the grassroots level. This executive summary provides an overview of the background, methodology, and findings associated with these studies.

## **Background:**

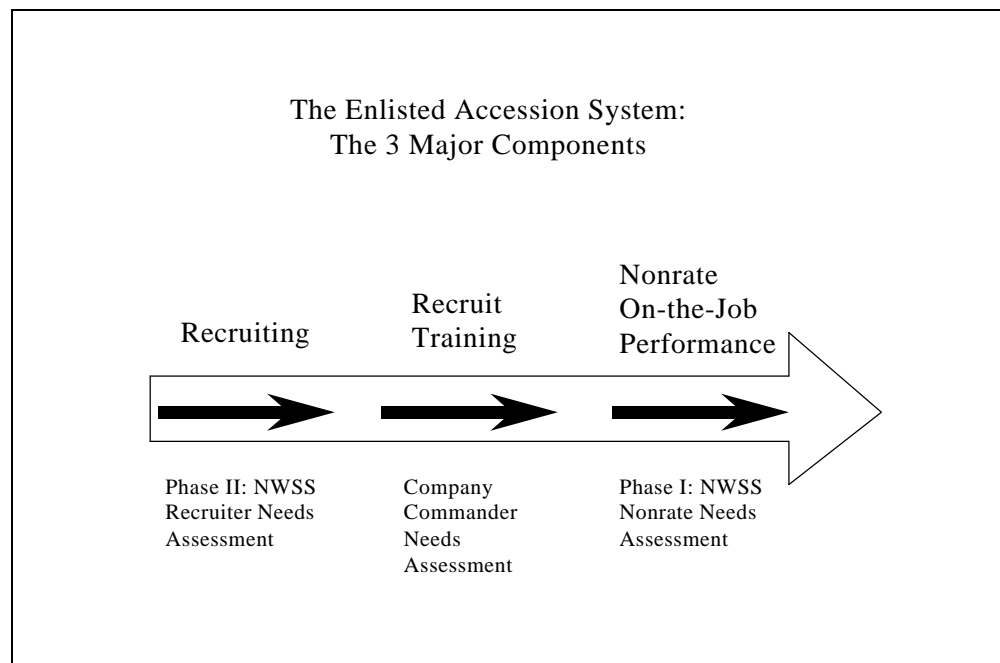
The three studies were not conceived at the outset as a comprehensive ECD effort to define enlisted performance from initial entry to chief. Rather, the NWSS and the CPONA began as separate attempts to better develop discrete portions of the enlisted workforce and the PODI was a natural byproduct of these two analyses. As the NWSS analyzed the enlisted accession process up to A-school and the CPONA defined performance expectations of chiefs, needs associated with the intermediate rates virtually spilled out of these two studies. These petty officer needs were captured in the PODI by a team composed of members who were participants in both the NWSS and the CPONA. Put simply, while the NWSS defined one end of the spectrum (E-1 – E-4), the CPONA defined the other end (E-6 – E-7), and the PODI defined the bridge between them (E-4 – E-6).



The NWSS was the first of the ECD studies to be chartered; it began as a successor to a Quality Action Team that had been wrestling with the issue of ensuring that nonrates were engaged in “meaningful” (i.e., career developing and challenging) work. To figure this out, it was clear to the QAT that there first must be a solid understanding of the Service’s expectations for the role and job of a nonrate.

What is it that nonrates ought to be doing in order to help accomplish their units' missions? What qualities do they need to have in order to reach their full potential? It was clear that the answers to these questions would then provide the perfect opportunity to examine precursory issues: given these expectations for nonrates, how do we recruit the kind of people we need to become nonrates and how should we then indoctrinate and assimilate them into the Service?

Thus was conceived the Nonrate Workforce Structure Study which was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the entire Coast Guard enlisted accession system that encompasses what has been called “the three-team commitment” of Recruiting, Recruit Training, and On-The-Job Performance of Nonrates (at their first units). To meld these three elements into a unified accession system, the NWSS examined and linked all of the processes and products associated with these elements from initial attraction of potential Coast Guard applicants to their development as fully functioning nonrates in the field.

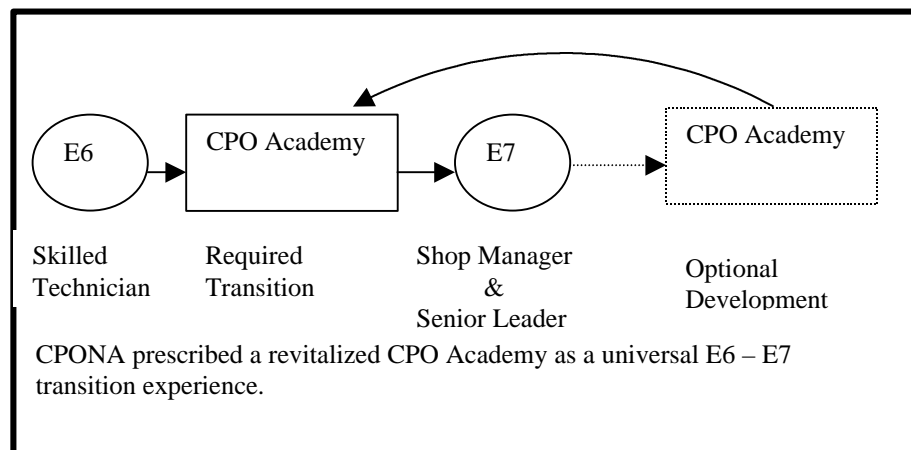


NWSS found what many had already suspected, that the accession system was not completely aligned in providing its final product—entry-level enlisted members ready to perform their duties in the field and prepared to reach their full potential in the Coast Guard. The solutions proposed by NWSS will enable all three components of the enlisted accession system to work together for this common purpose.

As NWSS sought to understand the extent to which nonrate work is career enhancing, larger questions arose such as what do we mean by “career”?

What does this career look like? One must know what the job entails at the far end of the enlisted career pipeline if one is to determine how to march in that direction from the career outset as a nonrate. As it happened, another enlisted workforce analysis appeared to have the answers.

That analysis was the Chief Petty Officer Needs Assessment, which focused on the other end of the enlisted spectrum at the point where enlisted technicians at the E-6 level become front-line “shop managers” at the E-7 level. Like the NWSS, this study began with the end state in mind by asking, what is it that the Coast Guard expects of its CPO corps and what professional preparation does a selected E-6 need to fulfill these expectations? The CPONA was chartered partly in response to concerns that emanated from Leadership Workgroups 1 & 2 and the 1996 Training Infrastructure Study. These groups identified changes needed to better support the Chiefs Corps, a key element of which involves the CPO Academy. While the Academy’s curriculum met the needs of E-8’s and E-9’s, not all E-7’s, let alone *prospective* E-7’s, were guaranteed an opportunity to benefit from the CPO Academy experience. The CPONA sought to better align the Academy’s curriculum with real-world senior enlisted performance expectations at the E-7 level.

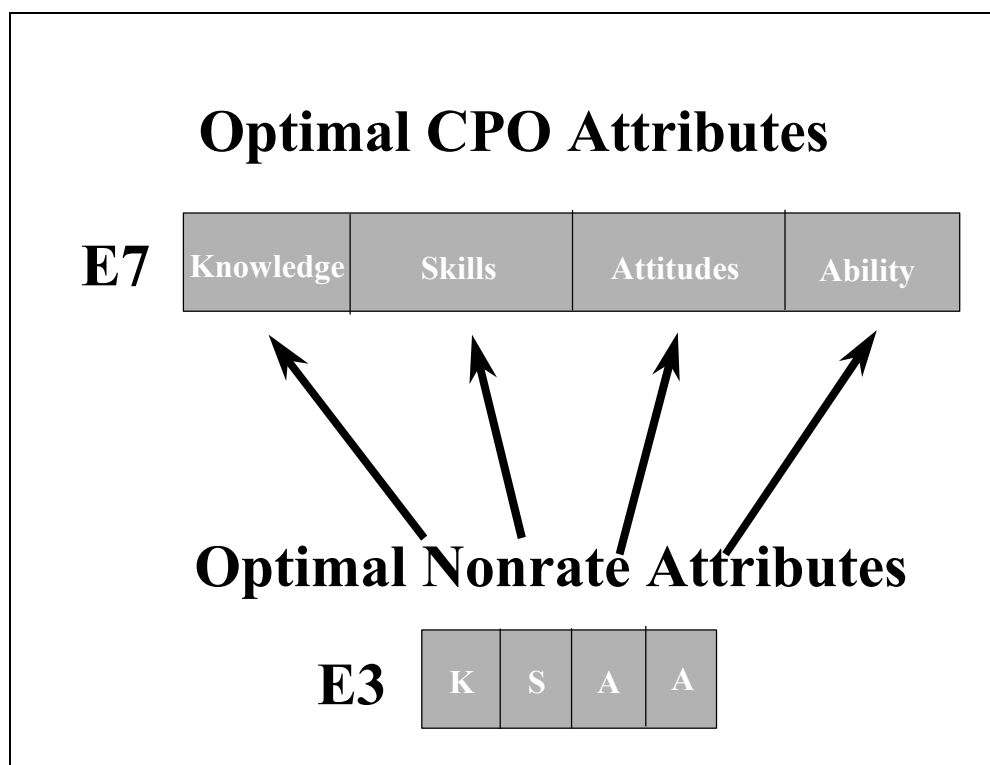


By analyzing the performance requirements and expectations of newly advanced CPOs, the CPONA team was able to contrast this with actual knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities of prospective E-7’s (selected E-6’s) to measure the extent of the “jump” from petty officer to chief.

This enabled restructuring of the CPO Academy curriculum to bridge the gap between E-6 and E-7—paygrades with dramatically different performance expectations. In 1994, Leadership Workgroup 1 first

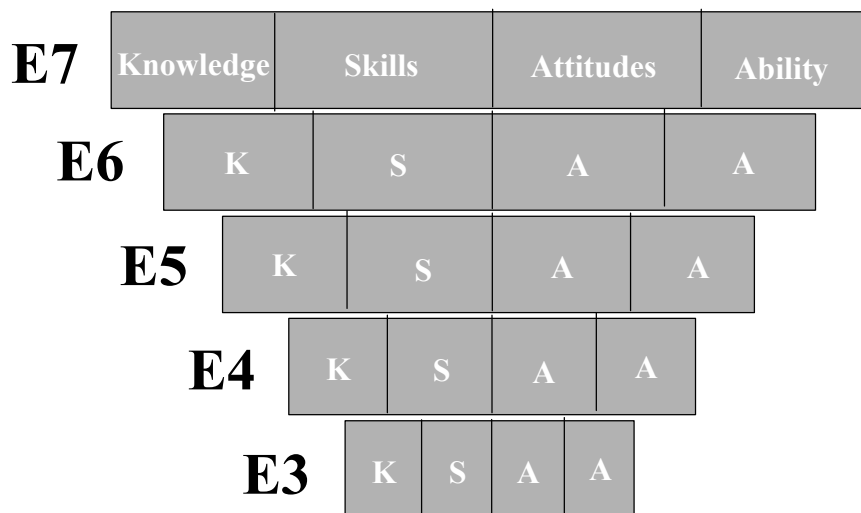
articulated the vision of the CPO Academy as gateway into the Chiefs Corps; CPONA would turn that vision into reality.

Finally, as NWSS and CPONA took shape, it became apparent that these analyses provided two anchors to an entire enlisted developmental plan from prospective enlistee to CPO. In other words, once the roles and performance of both nonrates and chiefs are defined, then the paygrades in between should incorporate successive levels of development from nonrate to chief. All that was lacking was a sequence of developmental building blocks from one to the other.



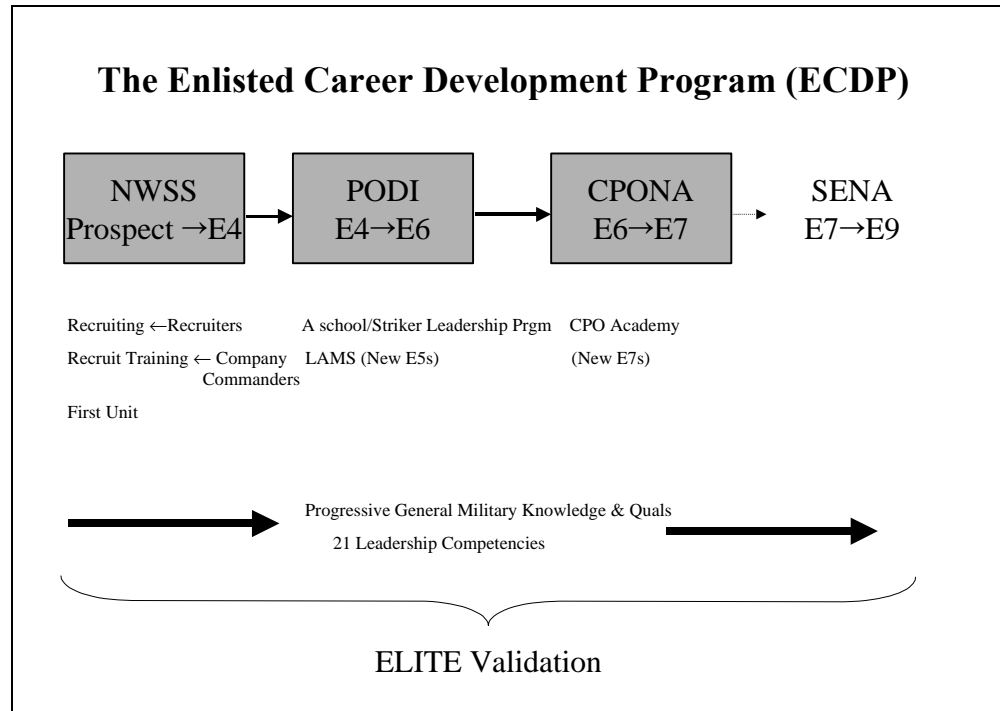
Defining this sequence became the mission of the Petty Officer Development Initiative, which looked at the NWSS and CPONA as two endpoints that could be connected by strands of professional development for the Petty Officer Corps through E-7.

## Career Long Development

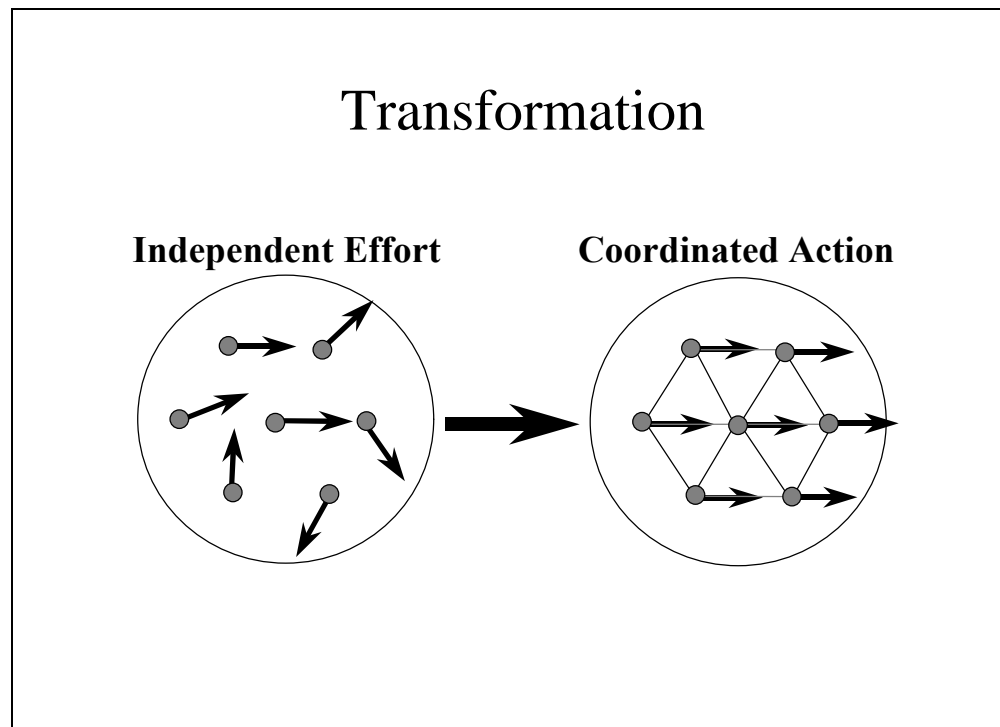


The focus group visits comprised the final stage of the studies. This was in direct response to then Chief of Staff VADM Loy's call to communicate and validate the results of the ECD analyses in the field before implementation. The Coast Guard's 1997 Workforce Cultural Audit revealed widespread perceptions that communications from the Service's leadership to the troops was lacking and the ELITE focus groups took proactive measures to ensure that these studies affecting the entire enlisted Workforce were widely publicized before any of their recommendations were enacted. This proved to be an extraordinary opportunity to tap into the collective wisdom of thousands of Coast Guard members resulting in much more finely honed recommendations than would have otherwise been possible.

As a footnote to this background, future plans call for a final analysis in the ECD series to address E-8 and E-9 performance expectations and preparation. Once completed, this Senior Enlisted Needs Assessment (SENA) will complete the ECD series of plans making it truly a cradle-to-grave development strategy for the enlisted workforce.

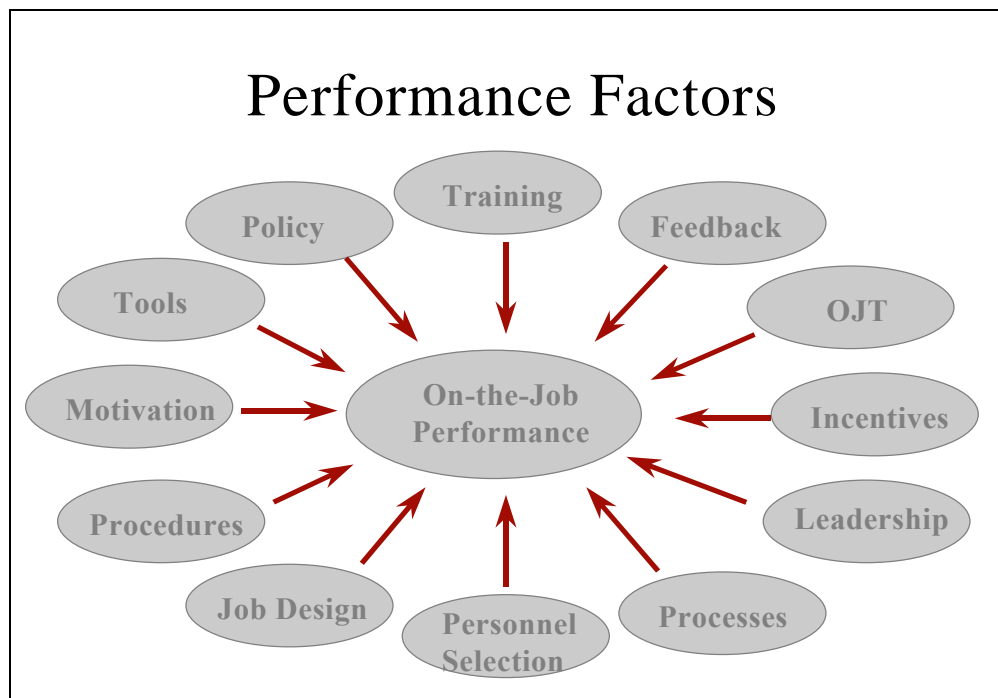


As a result of the ECD proposals, previously independent professional growth and training efforts will be harnessed with a variety of new initiatives to provide a coordinated and innovative career development program.



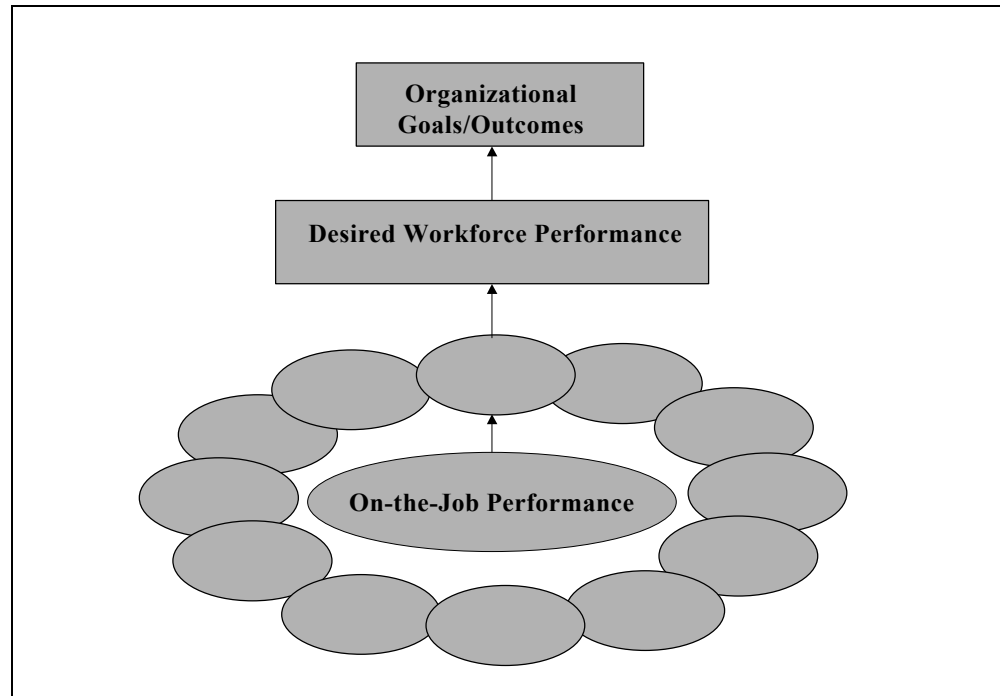
## **Methodology:**

The ECD analyses were conducted by specially selected teams using a Human Performance Technology (HPT) approach. HPT is a set of methods and procedures, as well as a strategy for solving problems and for realizing opportunities related to the performance of people. It can be applied to individuals, small groups, and large organizations. HPT begins by looking at an organization's outcomes, which are based upon its mission, strategy and goals, and then it derives from these the desired workforce performance that will achieve the outcomes. Next, the actual state of workforce performance is captured. By contrasting the actual and desired states, gaps between the two are identified and analyses are conducted to determine root causes of the gaps. These root causes may stem from any of three basic groups of origin: knowledge/skills/attitudes/abilities, motivation/incentives, and the environment/resources. Within these three groups there is a universe of factors that influence human behavior in the production of desired outputs resulting in higher outcomes.



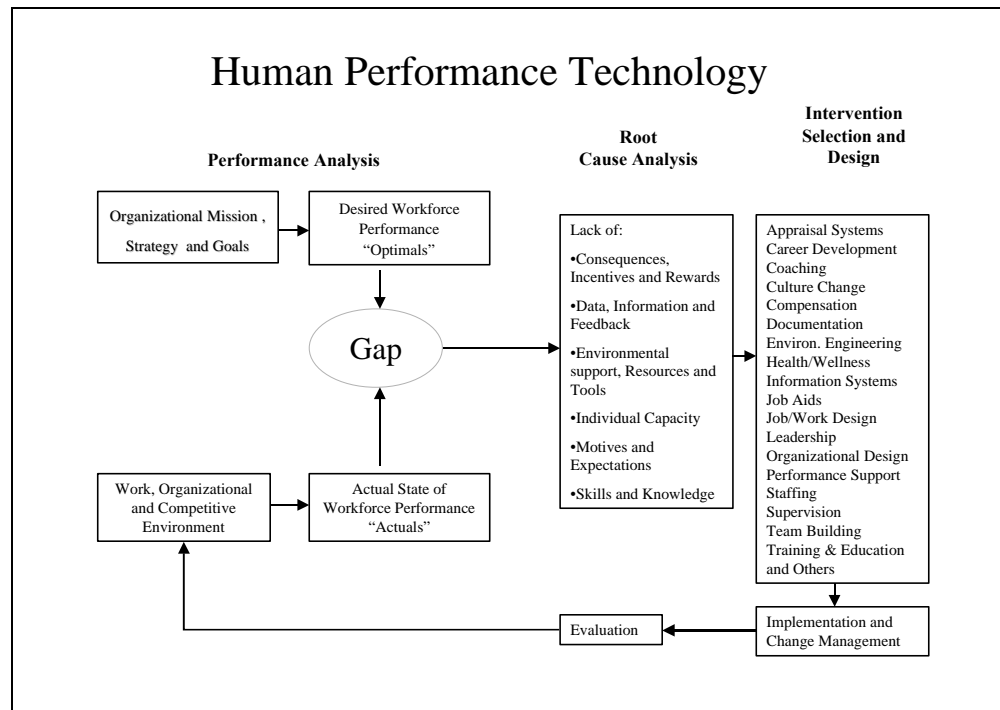
Only when the root cause of a performance gap is properly identified can an appropriate system of interventions be designed and developed to fill the gap.





Subsequent evaluation of the results will monitor the alignment between actual and desired workforce performance to ensure that the original gap remains closed and to detect any newly appearing gaps.

Therefore, rather than serving as a mere snapshot in time, an HPT analysis properly done provides a basis for ongoing assessment of workforce alignment with organizational needs.



Both the NWSS and the CPONA defined these attributes and shortfalls for nonrates and CPOs respectively. For the CPONA, this included:

- Optimal Attributes for CPOs (desired state) - Determined the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities required for the 21st century CPO. This list became the goal of all career-long development efforts and provided the specific components on which to measure the success of the program.
- Actual Attributes for PO1's (current state) - Assessed how the current group of first class petty officers about to be promoted compare to our “optimal chief.”
- Gaps (between the two) - Assessed the current gap we must bridge to develop optimal CPOs.

And for the NWSS, this included:

- Optimal Attributes for Nonrates (desired state) - Determined the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities required for the 21st century nonrate. This list became the end product of the enlisted accession system and provided the specific components on which to measure the success of the system.
- Actual Attributes for Nonrates (current state) - Assessed how the current population of nonrates compares to the “optimal nonrate.”
- Gaps (between the two) - Assessed the current gap we must bridge to develop optimal nonrates.

The NWSS also produced similar lists for both Company Commanders and Recruiters. Subsequent root cause analyses produced numerous recommendations for interventions.

## **Discussion**

### **NWSS**

The Nonrate Study team began with the end in mind by ascertaining precisely what performance is required of a nonrate in the field to enable Coast Guard units to accomplish their missions. Using this data, the team determined those characteristics that recruiters needed to target in order to hire individuals with greatest likelihood of success as members of the enlisted workforce. Then, Recruit Training was redesigned to bridge the

gap between the civilian men and women who enlist and the high-performing nonrates they need to become to do the work of the Coast Guard. As part of this Recruit Training alignment, a thorough needs assessment was conducted for the job of Company Commander. The impact of this alignment and reengineering is immense. As a consequence, a critical portion of the Coast Guard workforce—entry-level enlisted members—will be properly developed to fulfill its intended vital role. This will further affect morale and retention issues with countless benefits that accrue therefrom. The NWSS is empowering to the entry-level enlisted workforce since it identifies and provides for the development of specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities required of nonrates. This means that the junior enlisted men and women who actually deliver the services provided by the Coast Guard will be truly *Semper Paratus* to protect, defend, and serve the nation's maritime interests.

The NWSS project is without precedent; this represents the first-ever attempt to bring the accession system in alignment with definite, measurable nonrate performance expectations based on organizational and field (customer) needs. The associated data collection and analyses involved nationwide interviewing, surveying, researching, and benchmarking. The analysis team developed systemic interventions and solutions that cross traditional “stovepipe” organizational boundaries so that each accession system component supports the common goal of producing high-performing Coast Guard nonrates. In addition to meeting the mandates of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), the team's data-driven HPT process ensures that its results will address the real barriers to nonrate performance and not merely treat the symptoms. The benefits of the team's revolutionary work ultimately impact the entire Coast Guard enlisted workforce since it affects the way all Coast Guard enlisted members are hired and initially prepared for duty.

In summary, NWSS better defined what the Coast Guard needs from its entry-level enlisted workforce in order to 1) accomplish the Service's missions, and 2) become the future enlisted leaders of the Coast Guard. This definition of performance requirements provided the basis to determine how the Coast Guard ought to recruit young men and women, how these recruits then need to be trained and motivated, and then how the recruit's first units need to continue their development and reinforce what they have learned. This will result in a Coast Guard whose workforce is performance oriented from Day 1—an organization that knows what it needs from its people in order to serve the public and provides what its people need to get the job done. By starting all the way upstream at accession, this professional development, mission focus, and accountability for performance will be imbued throughout the

organization. This, in turn, will enable the processes and infrastructures associated with enlisted recruiting and recruit training to minimize attrition, inefficiencies, and misalignment that consume scarce resources.

The NWSS results are ready for immediate implementation. Already, objectives for three new curricula—for recruiters, recruits, and Recruit Training company commanders—have been designed and await development. If approved, a special implementation team will commence NWSS Phase 3 to tackle the myriad issues involved in executing the study's recommendations.

## **CPONA**

The Chief Petty Officer Needs Assessment (CPONA) conducted a comprehensive review of Chief Petty Officer (CPO) performance expectations and requirements. This needs assessment is vital to the service as it targets the most critical transition point in an enlisted member's career, the point at which the first class petty officer must evolve from a technical expert into a leader and manager worthy of the chief's anchors.

During the course of this project, the CPONA team engaged in an exhaustive data collection and analysis effort, gathering information from hundreds of sources. These data sources included extensive benchmarking of each military service; 12 industry-leading civilian companies; a comprehensive search of relevant literature; 50 interviews with the senior leadership of the Coast Guard; and a myriad of interviews, surveys, and focus groups involving field personnel.

The CPONA team analyzed the varied and complex demands placed on CPOs, synthesized the vast body of data and developed a model of an "optimal" CPO—one who is equipped to meet all those demands. This model is a list of the 115 attributes (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities) that every CPO must possess regardless of rating or assignment.

The team then compared the first class petty officers (PO1's) currently on the list for advancement to E-7 against the model of the optimal CPO by gathering an immense amount of data on the attributes PO1's currently possess. A 360-degree, multiple-rater perspective was captured by surveying supervisors, peers and subordinates of every PO1 on the list. By analyzing the gaps between the actual attributes possessed by those on the list against the optimal model, the team made recommendations on how best to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities before new chiefs arrive at the CPO Academy. Consequently, the CPO Academy

curriculum could be refocused and tailored to better serve the Coast Guard in the next millennium.

The CPONA team went well beyond the impressive achievement of revising the CPO Academy curriculum. Its results provide for a linked development strand combining resident training, on-the-job training, and experience with a comprehensive evaluation and measurement system to gauge the effectiveness of each intervention.

In keeping with the tenets of a performance-based organization, these results add no additional burdens to the workforce and require minimal additional expenses while meshing seamlessly with Coast Guard culture.

## **PODI**

The Petty Officer Development Initiative (PODI), authorized as an adjunct analysis, involved a blending of the NWSS with the CPONA. Using the same rigor and methods as the other studies, the PODI was conducted by a core group of analysts who were members of both of the other studies who recognized that the elements of a PODI plan virtually spilled out of the other studies. Once E-1-to-E-3 and E-7 performance expectations had been defined, it became fairly easy to identify E-4-to-E-6 requirements. In focusing on these intermediate paygrades, the PODI team sought to answer the question, “How do we develop essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities that cannot be imparted in an existing training experience (such as Recruit Training or CPO Academy) or at any single transition point?” What this team ultimately accomplished, aided by NWSS and CPONA findings, is truly remarkable: the framework for a sweeping program that will revolutionize the Coast Guard’s entire enlisted development process, from the time recruits enter the Service to the time first class petty officers earn their anchors as chiefs.

Like the NWSS and the CPONA, the PODI team’s collection of valid and reliable data included more than the combined amount captured by Leadership Workgroups 1 and 2 and the Workforce Cultural Audit. The team produced a sequential professional development program combining resident and non-resident training, on-the-job training, and experience—all completely consistent with the Service’s Leadership Development Plan (COMDTINST 5351). The team’s results provide mid-grade petty officers a means to learn, practice, develop, and nurture the attributes that will make them successful leaders helping to realize the Commandant’s goal to “build superior competency among our people...and instill superior leadership and management skills at all levels.”

The PODI contributes mightily to a career-long investment in our enlisted workforce. The results, developed as a complete and systemic solution set, will help to make the Coast Guard the employer of choice for young people by improving morale and retention for these “forgotten” paygrades.

## **ELITE**

The focus group tour was a unique and powerful demonstration of the degree to which the organization values its most important asset—its people. The mission of the focus group team was to engage in open, face-to-face dialogue with group units concerning the ECD Program. The team was well received throughout its travels and the concept of a comprehensive enlisted career development plan was heartily endorsed by the members who participated in the presentation and focus groups.

The team used a PowerPoint presentation to convey its information to the group units so that all units received the same message. To appreciate the enormous undertaking involved in the ECD needs assessments, the field had to have a full understanding of who comprised the teams and how they employed Human Performance Technology to reach their conclusions. The field representatives’ confidence in the studies was greatly bolstered by the fact that the ECD teams consisted of field members like themselves of diverse backgrounds who they could instantly relate to. Once the team won their audience’s confidence, it proceeded to give an overview of HPT followed by an outline of the studies and their recommendations. The recommendations generated a great deal of excitement and provoked much discussion that produced some excellent suggestions. This kind of input from the group enhanced the final products of the ECD efforts.

Following the PowerPoint briefings at each unit visited, the team conducted focus groups composed of 12 to 20 participants of various ranks and ratings. Seeking field input in this way established a sense of shared ownership as the members realized that they were part of the process. The focus groups not only validated the data of the studies but also enriched many of their recommendations.

## **Epilogue:**

The ECD studies are complete, the field has been briefed, and now it is time for action. In the focus groups, the team always asked one final question of the participants: “Do you see any barriers in making these changes happen?”

The number one response was not some content related concern regarding the studies; instead, it was general apprehension that the ECD recommendations would not be implemented.

Expressing this pervasive doubt, one field member remarked, “We (the CG) do a great job taking care of the American Public, but a poor job taking care of ourselves.” And another attendee remarked, “Don’t kid us that you’re really going to use any of this information.”

The implementation of these studies is an opportunity for the organization to dispel such cynicism and stoke an underlying confidence and pride among its people. We must keep the faith with the young SA who after she attended a focus group presentation stated, “(This program) really gives me hope about my future in the Coast Guard.” The focus group visits revealed a widely held belief that the Coast Guard is indeed the “World’s Premier Maritime Service” with an understanding that it’s people, not cutters, boats or aircraft, that make this so. Our members want to be challenged and are eager to do the work of the Coast Guard if we’ll just give them the wherewithal. Enacting the ECD program is a sound business decision and will have a lasting positive impact in terms of enlisted workforce development, performance, morale and retention. If we truly believe that “Preparation Equals Performance,” then we must believe that the ECD Program, by better preparing the “Guardians of the Sea,” will ultimately benefit all Americans who depend on our Service. A complete set of recommendations associated with the ECD studies is provided in enclosure (1). All supporting data will be digitally stored for use by those involved in implementation efforts.

Signed:

---

CAPT J. B. Willis (G-WTT)  
Guidance Team Leader  
NWSS

---

CAPT B. Abiles (G-WTL)  
Guidance Team Leader  
CPONA and PODI

---

MCPOCG V. W. Patton III (G-CMCPO)  
Guidance Team Co-Leader  
CPONA and PODI

Encl: (1) ECD Recommendations for Implementation